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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the responses of educators at three stages of their preparation and experience to statements describing their levels of general teacher efficacy (GTE) and personal teaching efficacy (PTE). Participants were graduate and undergraduate students in a teacher education program who were enrolled in their final semester of coursework prior to student teaching, had just finished with their student teaching experience, or were experienced, practicing teachers. Analysis of participants' responses on the Teacher Efficacy Scale indicated that the internship experience attenuated their GTE. To the statement, "The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background," preservice participants indicated a level of disagreement significantly higher than internship completers or practicing teachers. Teachers scored significantly lower than preservice student teachers and internship completers on their agreement with the statement, "A teacher is very limited in what he/she can achieve because a student's home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement." PTE was high for all three groups and remained so regardless of the extent of teaching experience. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

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# A Comparison of the Efficacy Levels of Preservice, Internship, and Inservice Teachers

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# A Comparison of the Efficacy Levels of Preservice, Internship, and Inservice Teachers

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## Introduction

Teacher efficacy has been defined as the conviction one has in his or her ability to effect positive change in student learning (Ashton, 1984) and, furthermore, to influence even difficult or unmotivated students (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) identify teacher efficacy as one of only a few examples of how teacher characteristics can positively affect student learning and/or behavior. An investigation into the effect of teacher practice (Parker, 2000) supported the findings of a 1976 RAND study indicating that measures of teacher efficacy have a substantial impact upon student achievement (Armor et al., 1976).

The construct of teacher efficacy is commonly comprised of general and personal teaching efficacy. Personal teaching efficacy (PTE) is the teachers' belief that they are able to bring about student learning. It is "an internally held belief about oneself that solidifies with experience and time" (Henson, 2001, p. 12). General teacher efficacy (GTE) is the belief that teachers can overcome any negative influences of a student's background. Research suggests that years of teaching experience affects both scales: PTE tends to increase and GTE tends to decrease with teaching experience (Ross, 1994).

Similarly, the student teaching experience is the most significant episode in student teachers' development of both GTE and PTE (Richards & Killen, 1994; Turney, 1988). During their internship, the student teachers are re-evaluating their

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abilities as potential career teachers. Research findings, however, are inconclusive as to the effect that student teaching experiences have on teaching efficacy (Lortie, 1975).

## Statement of the Problem

While research into the relationship of GTE to PTE has been conducted for more than a decade (Bandura, 1993; Fritz et al., 1995; Woolfolk and Hoy, 1990), the issue of change in efficacy over time remains largely unresolved (Henson, 2001). The questions central to this study were (1) Does classroom experience affect PTE or GTE? and (2) Does extended classroom experience affect PTE or GTE? This study assessed responses of educators at three stages of their preparation/experience to statements describing their levels of GTE and PTE.

## Significance of the Problem

If, as the research cited indicates, teacher efficacy has a positive effect on student achievement, and if teacher efficacy is susceptible to change, then researchers need to examine the points in teacher preparation and practice at which change is likely to occur. Acting upon the results of that research, schools of education could develop pre-service and in-service opportunities that would optimize the positive changes and minimize the negative changes in teacher efficacy.

## Method

### Participants

The N = 196 were students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate education

courses at a university in the southeastern United States. The participants in the study were divided into three groups: (1) Sixty were students enrolled in their final semester of coursework prior to the student teaching experience; (2) Fifty were interns who had just completed their student teaching experience; and (3) Eighty-six were practicing teachers with M = 5.51, SD = 3.83 years of classroom teaching experience.

## Instrumentation

The Teacher Efficacy Scale (Short Form) (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) employs a six-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) and contains two subscales of Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE) and General Teaching Efficacy (GTE). Acceptable Cronbach's alphas of .68 and .69 were recorded for the GTE and PTE respectively.

## Results

A 3 X 2 mixed between/within ANOVA was conducted using SPSS 10.0 for Windows. The between factor was student status (preservice students prior to their student teaching, internship students who had completed their student teaching experiences, and inservice teachers), while the within factor was teaching efficacy (general and personal). Total N = 196 was utilized for analysis. There were no univariate or multivariate within-cell outliers at alpha < .001. Results of evaluation of assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, linearity, and multicollinearity were satisfactory.

A significant within effect was obtained among students' GTE and PTE scores, indicating that all three groups of students scored significantly higher on PTE than GTE, Wilks' $\lambda$ = .345, $F(1,195) = 370.09$, $p < .001$. The multivariate $\varepsilon^2$ based on Wilks' $\lambda$ was .642. Means and standard deviations are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. *Mean and standard deviations scores on the PTE and GTE.*

**2. TSE**

Measure: MEASURE_1

| | | | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| TSE | Mean | Std. Error | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | 4.872 | .047 | 4.780 | 4.964 |
| 2 | 3.463 | .065 | 3.335 | 3.591 |

1 = PTE, 2 = GTE.

A significant interaction effect was obtained among student status and teaching efficacy $F(1,195) = 6.59$, $p = .011$, indicating that students who had not completed their internship scored significantly higher on GTE than either students who had just completed their internship or inservice teachers. The multivariate $\varepsilon^2$ based on Wilks' $\lambda$ was .043. Means and standard deviations are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. *Means and standard deviations on GTE.*

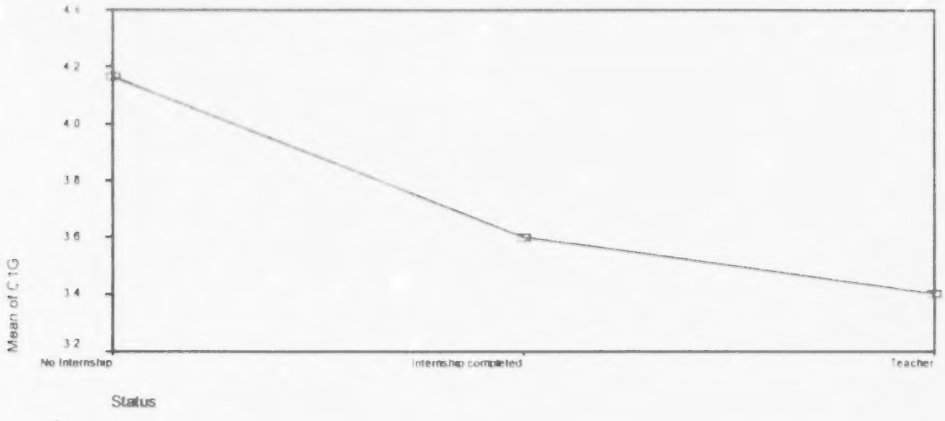
**Descriptive Statistics**

Dependent Variable: GTE

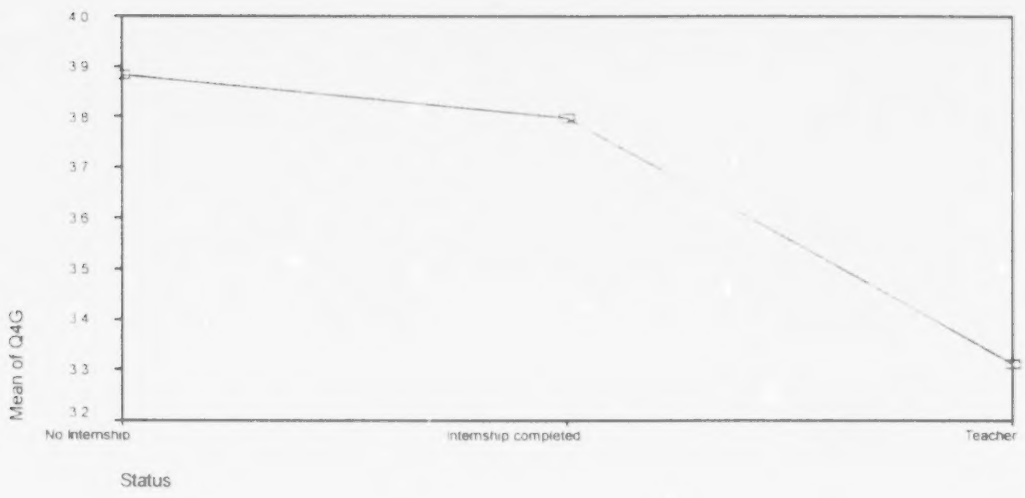
| Status | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| No Internship | 3.72 | .72 | 60 |
| Internship completed | 3.38 | .90 | 50 |
| Teacher | 3.29 | .98 | 86 |
| Total | 3.44 | .90 | 196 |

## Discussion

The five GTE questions were analyzed to assess which questions differed among the three groups of respondents. The findings of this study suggest that the internship experience attenuates GTE. Two questions (Q1 and Q4) differed among the groups. To the statement "The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background," the preservice participants indicated a level of disagreement significantly higher than internship completers or teachers. No differences were found between internship completers and teachers on Q1. (See below.)




Teachers scored significantly lower than preservice student participants and internship completers in their agreement with the statement "A teacher is very limited in what he/she can achieve because a student's home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement." No differences were found between preservice student participants and internship completers on Q4. (See below.)




PTE is high for all three groups, and results of the study suggest that it remains so regardless of the extent of teaching experience. The internship did not affect PTE, which was generally high at 4.87 (See below).

**Descriptive Statistics**

Dependent Variable: PTE

| Status | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| No Internship | 4.74 | 64 | 60 |
| Internship completed | 4.97 | 69 | 50 |
| Teacher | 4.90 | 60 | 87 |
| Total | 4.87 | 64 | 197 |

While a possible explanation for the high PTE of inservice teachers could be the sample involved in the study (those returning to graduate school for A-level certification), investigation into the PTE of inservice teachers who do not seek higher certification is warranted. Further investigation could help determine whether teacher candidates possess high PTE before entering the field or develop high PTE as a result of their training and the teaching experience.

Finally, the results of this study suggest that teacher education programs address the issue of the attenuation of GTE. Ross (1995) has identified studies of both preservice and inservice teachers. Suggestions for improving preservice teachers' GTE include establishing mentoring programs during the internship and strengthening preparation in the area of classroom discipline. He cites skill development activities, collaboration, and opportunities for school-level decision making and as holding potential for increasing GTE among inservice teachers.

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